

North Georgia News

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Blairsville woman life-flighted to Erlanger following Saturday crash

By Charles Duncan
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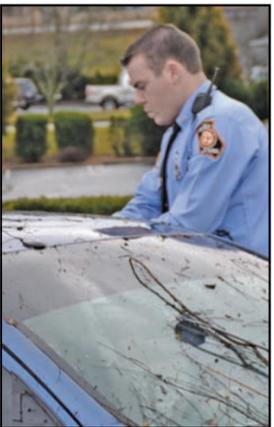
A 58-year-old Blairsville woman was life-flighted to Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga, Tenn., after her car crashed through a fence and into a creek at The Home Depot on Saturday, according to the Georgia State Patrol.

Blairsville Police Officer Darren Jones was the first officer to arrive at the accident scene.

The accident happened before noon on Saturday, TFC Cody White, of the Georgia State Patrol said.

According to witnesses, the blue Ford sedan driven by Tracie Marie Simpkins circled the roundabout at The Home Depot about three times before the accident, Trooper White said.

"Then she ran over a stop sign and headed straight to the South end of the store parking lot," Trooper White said.



TFC Cody White

The Ford made contact with a metal buggy station with one buggy inside the corral. That buggy would fall on its side and eventually go airborne and strike the driver's side headlight of a Chevrolet pickup in the store's parking lot.

Witnesses, including the store's surveillance video, indicated that the Ford sedan

was traveling at a speed of 40 mph through the parking lot at the time it crashed the fencing that protects drivers from the nearby creek.

The end result – the Ford sedan crashed through the fencing that separates The Home Depot from the Ingles Shopping Center.

Also, a creek runs between the two properties, and that's where the Ford's progress ended, Trooper White said.

"After the buggy hit the pickup, the Ford continued on, no skid marks, struck the metal fencing and plunged into the creek," Trooper White said.

Emergency workers arrived soon afterward, and worked feverishly to free Simpkins from the vehicle, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

Trooper White said it was too early to determine the cause of the crash.

See *Crash*, 2A



Union County Sheriff Mack Mason examines the Ford sedan that crashed through fencing at The Home Depot parking lot on Saturday and went into the nearby creek. Photo/Charles Duncan

More snow and ice headed our way

By Charles Duncan
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The coldest January in what seems like forever has thawed out, but don't put that salt mix away just yet.

The National Weather Service is calling for a winter mix Wednesday night into Thursday morning, with temperatures dropping to 18 degrees.

The weather service calls for a 30 percent chance of frozen precipitation on that occasion.

The wintery mix would come just eight days after the region experienced its coldest temperatures in almost 40 years as temperatures in Union County were recorded at 3 degrees below zero.

Add in the wind chill factor and the real feel was almost 20 degrees below zero, according to the weather service.

Also, a 40 percent



Man it was cold last week at The Ridges in Young Harris. This water wheel looks more like an ice sculpture. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

chance of snow comes Friday with predicted 15-degree temperatures, and a high for the day of 35 degrees.

Rain or snow is in the forecast through Friday.

Temperatures gradually

See *Weather*, 2A

Lacey saves 31-year-old man from elements



Anthony Clark Yebba

By Charles Duncan
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A 31-year-old Morganton man is alive today thanks to Union County K-9 Cop Lacey.

The 9-month-old bloodhound, located Anthony Clark Yebba following a one-vehicle accident on Jan. 2, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

Yebba had left the scene of an accident on Loving Road, with temperatures at 28 degrees and falling, with light snow already on the ground, Sheriff Mason said.

Union County Deputy Sheriff Jeff McConnell responded to the accident and found no one at the accident scene," Sheriff Mason said.

"A Ford F-150 pickup truck was off the side of the road, and there was an open container of Budweiser in the



Union County K-9 Cop Lacey is credited with saving the life of a 31-year-old Morganton man. Photo/Charles Duncan

vehicle," the sheriff said.

Georgia State Patrol Trooper Drew Phillips and Union County Deputy Sheriff Perry Groves also arrived on the scene.

With weather conditions degrading, and McConnell's K-9 partner Lacey also at the scene, it was decided to let her track and find the driver, whose medical condition was unknown at the time, Sheriff Mason said.

"They knew the weather was going to get worse, and the quicker we found the driver, the better chance they had of surviving," Sheriff Mason said. "You can die or exposure in 15 minutes or less."

Lacey, a certified track dog, exited the patrol vehicle

and got a scent from the disabled F-150. She led officers to a spot where the crash victim had stopped and drank a Budweiser, Deputy McConnell said.

"We didn't know if the driver was possibly injured and making their way through the woods," Deputy McConnell said. "Due to the incoming cold front, we knew we had to find him soon."

"She got the scent off the driver-side door and seat and took off," Deputy McConnell said. "She led us approximately 150 to 200 feet down Loving Road and found an empty beer can matching the open container inside the

See *Lacey*, 3A

BOE sets make up day for Feb. 14

By Charles Duncan
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Union County students won't love anything about Feb. 14 this year.

Valentine's Day, an otherwise planned off day for students, is now a make up day for Jan. 7th, a day when temperatures dipped below zero and black ice made school bus travel hazardous.

Jan. 7th did serve a purpose, as a make up day for a teacher in service day.

Feb. 17, a planned observance of President's Day, also is now a teacher in service day.

"That's two teacher work days," and one student make up day," Union County Schools Superintendent Gary Steppe said.

The board approved the changes unanimously.

In other business, the board has eliminated the orchestra pit from the planned multi-use fine arts auditorium.

Now, architects from Bowen & Watson will revise plans and come back with details of how the change will impact the project.

The measure is a definite cost savings.

In other business, board members learned that approximately 87 percent of tax col-



Above, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jeremy Williams gives a breakdown of the school system's new website; below, Primary School Principal Millie Owen, right, gives a UCPS update. Photo/Charles Duncan

See *BOE*, 2A

Paris, Shuler win 2013 Society awards

By Charles Duncan
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The Union County Historical Society Preservationists of The Year for 2013 are Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and Betty Jane Shuler.

Union County Historical Society President Bud Akins said a historic preservationist is someone who actively takes the necessary measures to protect something impossible to replace.

"This includes, but is not limited to, historic structures from demolition or degradation, historic sites within a historical district, and, along

See *Historical*, 3A

Betty Jane Shuler, above, right, and Lamar Paris, below right, are the 2013 Union County Historical Society Preservationists of the Year. Both pictured with Bud Akins.



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RELAY FOR LIFE
American Cancer Society

20th Annual Kick Off
Thurs, January 16th

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Gribble Benefit Civic Center
Jan 24th 6 PM

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AARP Driver Safety course
United Community Bank
Feb. 6, 2014

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BASKETBALL:
Tues. Jan 14 @ Riverside JV 4:30, Varsity 6 PM
Fri. Jan 17 @ Social Circle 6 PM

WRESTLING:
Sat. Jan 18 @ Towns County Youth, Middle, High School 4 PM